



What Residents Should Know About Contracts for Law Enforcement

Background

If residents of Fairwood choose to incorporate, one option for police services would be to contract with another jurisdiction. Contracting with the King County Sheriff's Office has been the choice for most cities that have formed since the Growth Management Act of 1990. Contracting for services is a developing trend across the country.

What Does the Incorporation Study Show?

The incorporation study done by Berk and Associates assumed that a new city would contract for services. In order to estimate the related cost, the firm asked the King County Sheriff's Office to provide a contract cost estimate for the same level of service that Fairwood residents now enjoy.

The estimates used in the financial feasibility analysis assumed the same level of service, meaning that "City of Fairwood" residents would:

- share 24/7 patrol coverage with the surrounding unincorporated area
- have a police storefront officer
- add a police chief
- continue to use all specialized services provided by the Sheriff's Office

As noted in the study appendix, however, the leaders of a new city would have other options for designing their police department. Some options would increase the cost of the police, but others would not.

Why Do Some Cities Contract Instead of Forming Their Own Police Department?

There are many reasons, but here are the most common:

- Cities realize cost savings without sacrificing service
- New cities do not incur the start-up costs associated with a police department
- Cities do not incur liability for police actions
- Cities choose dedicated (city-only) personnel
- Cities maintain local control and identity with dedicated staff

Cost Savings and Exceptional Service

Contracts can take advantage of the capacities of a large-scale department, including numerous specialized police services, equipment, and necessary support functions such as record keeping. Costs and personnel are shared between unincorporated King County and contract cities, reducing the financial impact of administration, operation, specialization, and equipment.

One unique way that the Sheriff's Office can reduce costs is through our "cross-dispatching" protocols. Cross-dispatching allows cities to determine the types of calls for which the Sheriff's Office deputies will assist city officers and vice-versa. Greater flexibility means that the cities can staff at lower levels while still being assured that personnel will be available for back-up and priority details at all times.

No Start-Up Costs

Starting a new police department is an expensive endeavor. Not only will a city need to fund a recruiting and hiring effort, but also will need to equip its officers with uniforms, vehicles, radios, weapons, and more. Further, the police department will need a facility that provides holding cells, interview rooms, evidence and records storage, office space, and space for other police needs.

Cities Do Not Incur Liability for Police Actions

The King County Sheriff's Office assumes all liability for salary, wages, any other compensation, injury, sickness or liability to the public for negligent acts or omissions arising from the performance of the law enforcement services by the County. We can do this because our people are Sheriff's Office employees, and we are responsible for recruiting, testing, hiring, labor negotiations, discipline and related issues. Of course, cities can always choose to send officers to additional training, and city chiefs are informed of all personnel issues that affect his or her police department.

Cities Choose Dedicated Personnel and Benefit from Their Experience

Contract entities have a large pool of police professionals with varied backgrounds and expertise to choose from. Our detectives become experts in specialized fields and are recognized regionally, and in some cases, nationally, for their work.

If a city officer eventually chooses to leave the local department for other opportunities within the Sheriff's Office, the city participates in choosing their new officer. Officers make a minimum two-year commitment, and many of them stay for longer periods as they become a part of the community. In the assumptions made for the incorporation study, the "city officers" would be the storefront officer and city police chief.

Cities Maintain Local Control and Identity

A contract with the Sheriff's Office gives cities a great deal of local control and identity – comparable to the levels they would have with their own police department.

Priorities and Services... City officials work with their police chief to determine which police services they want to receive based on their local priorities. They may focus their dedicated resources on traffic, youth problems, drugs, community policing, or other local issues. They select the services they want from the broad array offered by the Sheriff's Office. The KCSO helps many contract chiefs develop an annual Service Efforts and Accomplishments report.

Identity... Cities can choose to have distinctive uniforms and vehicles for their city-dedicated staff. These uniforms and vehicles are marked with their city logo, which demonstrates the independence of their city department. There is no extra cost for maintaining city identity.

Fairwood residents should note that the incorporation study assumes that the city would be served with a "flex" contract model and only two dedicated/city-only officers (a chief and a storefront officer). Under this model, the proposed city would have less local control and identity than contract cities with more dedicated resources.

How Does a Contract Work?

The cities that contract with the King County Sheriff's Office negotiate with the county as a group, and operate under identical contract terms. The contract provides for three models and flexible service options.

The Sheriff's Office provides three contract models, and then allows the cities to choose which services they want under that model (some, such as patrol or 911 communications are mandatory). Each model offers a different balance of cost effectiveness and local control. All costs include the uniform, equipment, vehicles, insurance, administration, and support.

Flex Model	Shared Supervision Model	City Model
We respond to 911 calls and patrol the area as if the city were another unincorporated district. Because all services are shared, deputies wear county rather than city uniforms.	Under our most popular model, the city has dedicated patrol officers and a dedicated city chief who work only in the city. We call it shared supervision because the precinct command staff (sergeants, captains, major) supervise the city officers who are on patrol as well as the unincorporated deputies.	Under this model, every position serving the city is dedicated to the city. They essentially operate as a stand-alone city police department. They share specialized services such as major investigations with the county and other partners to significantly reduce costs.

Equitable and Flexible Cost Allocation

The cities that contract for law enforcement from the Sheriff's Office negotiated the terms of the contract together, ensuring equity while maintaining flexibility.

Cities are given the cost of work units (e.g., an investigative unit) and the cost of individual FTEs (e.g., a deputy). The cities then decide which functions they want to share, and which functions they want to have dedicated to them.

- For shared functions, the city pays for the service based on their percentage of the work done by the unit.
- For dedicated positions, the city pays the average unit cost of each FTE.

It can be difficult to compare the King County Sheriff's Office fully-loaded cost with the cost of a stand-alone department because costs associated with a police department may be carried elsewhere in the city's budget. As a point of reference, here is an overview of what we include in the cost of each sworn officer. All of these services become available to a city for law enforcement purposes.

- Salaries, Benefits, Overtime, Other Pays
- Uniform and all equipment
- Vehicle
- Insurance
- 800 MHz radio service charges
- Budget Office (payroll, etc.)
- Computer Support
- Property and evidence management
- Internal Investigations
- Personnel
- Research and crime analysis
- Polygraph
- Regional intelligence
- Legal Unit
- Photo Lab
- Records
- Training Unit
- Other administration, supplies, and overhead